

Ch – 5 Speech Improvements

A. Pronunciation, Stress and Accent

How do you understand a new word of a new language? We have to break the word to be able to correctly pronounce it.

A part of a word or a word which contains a single vowel sound is known as a syllable. It is a single unit of speech that builds up the structure of every word. It gives a word its pronunciation.

Each word contains at least one or more syllable as a word can be formed without a consonant sound but can't be formed without a vowel sound. E.g. 'a'

Following are the examples of words with single syllable:

1. Man
2. Cup
3. Hat

Single vowel sound can be made of more than one vowel letters. E.g.

1. Moon
2. Cake
3. Bought

As all of these words contain only one vowel sound, therefore, they are single syllable words.

Examples of words with two syllables:

1. Garden : gar den
2. Hotel : ho tel
3. Consist : con sist
4. Focus : fo cus

Examples of words with the three syllables:

1. September : sep tem ber
2. Department : de part ment
3. Telephone : te le phone
4. Camera : ca me ra
5. Saturday : sa tur day

Examples of words with four syllables:

1. Information : in for may tion
2. Practically : prac ti ca lly
3. Photography : pho to gra phy
4. Competition : com pe ti tion

Similarly, there can be words with even more syllables.

Word Stress:

When a word has more than one syllable, not all syllables are pronounced with the same degree of force.

Phoneme - The smallest unit at the level of sounds of one particular language is called ‘phoneme’. Peter Roach defines phonemes as “the abstract set of units as the basis of our speech.” Phonemes are systematically distinguishable from each other, e.g. the /t/ from /p/ in /tin/ and /pin/. The phoneme of spoken language differs from the letters of a written language.

The phonemes of English and their number vary from dialect to dialect, and also depend on the interpretation of the individual researcher. The number of consonant phonemes is generally put at 24 (or slightly more). The number of vowels is subject to greater variation; there are 20 vowel phonemes in Received Pronunciation, 14–16 in General American and 20–21 in Australian English. Out of these 12 are pure vowels or Monophthongs and 8 are vowel glides or Diphthongs.

Stress - Stress is the intensity or prominence given to a syllable. It may be defined as ‘emphasis on a syllable or word in the form of prominent, relative loudness’. In traditional approach, each English word consisting of more than one syllable can be ascribed to any one of these three degrees – primary or loud, secondary or medium and unstressed.

Regarding the production of stress, Peter Roach observes that it depends on the speaker using “more muscular energy than is used for unstressed syllables”. If prominence is given to a syllable in isolated words, it is called word-stress. When prominence is given to syllable in sentences, it is called sentence-stress.